

MEMO

To: Laurel Greenberg
From: Sarah Almer
Date: March 3, 2004
Re: Results from Focus Group Sessions and Suggestions for Video Content

Laurel,

As you know, I conducted focus groups to help determine the gaps and interests of the public on local public health and emergency preparedness for the video you are producing. The focus groups were held in Worcester, Lowell and Lawrence.

The focus group in Worcester was held in English with one woman receiving translation from a Spanish interpreter. In Lowell, the focus group was held in English. Each participant at this focus group except for one was bilingual English-Spanish; one man was bilingual English-Cambodian. The focus group in Lawrence was in English with Spanish translation for about half of the participants who spoke Spanish but not English.

Between the three focus groups, there were 21 total participants. Of the 21, there were 15 people of color and six white people. There were almost an even mix of men and women (ten and eleven, respectively). Every participant was poor or working class.

Our hope was to have equal numbers of white people and people of color in each of the focus groups. In fact, one focus group was predominately white people, one focus group was predominately people of color, and one focus group was entirely people of color.

There was concern raised that the Lawrence focus group translation was not "pure", as much of the translator's own sentiments were perceptible in the translation.

Since all the focus group participants were lived in urban areas, there was not a viable constituency to determine what rural public health issue would be good to highlight in the video. I think that food and water regulation would be a good focus here; it would be relevant to rural, suburban and urban viewers.

Despite the problems with the focus groups, they went well and generated useful information and guidelines.

Main points:

I think our original plan to have a three-part video on emergency preparedness and Bioterrorism; school nursing; and a third issue such as food and water regulation makes sense. I have listed the main points from the focus groups here; for more detail of the participants' responses, see the notes that follow.

- Overall, people did not understand public health; its definition, its breadth, or the difference between it and health care.
- Many people did not know that there are local boards of health or health departments in their town or city.
- The majority of people could not give examples of Bioterrorism.
- Many people associated public health with personal hygiene, and keeping bathrooms and kitchens in restaurants clean. People also associated public health with keeping refuse out of the streets, playgrounds and vacant lots.
- Many people do not think emergency preparedness is useful. Many felt 9/11 “just happened” and that prevention of such disasters occurs in vain.
- People thought the direction from the Bush administration to buy duct tape and plastic sheeting was ludicrous, and no one did it. People said they did not understand how plastic sheeting could successfully be put up in time of an attack and once up, how it could keep insidious biological agents out of their homes. People said also they wanted real information and not political gimmickry.
- People said they do not know the meaning of each of the Department of Homeland Security alert levels.
- Overall, people were displeased with the lack of information about public health and emergency preparedness in particular. Depending on the type of emergency, people did not know what the various types of responses would be. People wondered if there would be services like what FEMA and the Red Cross provide, or if there would be a different plan entirely.
- People thought it is the job of the government and government agencies to ensure safety in the case of a public health emergency.
- People wanted to learn about plans for emergency preparedness, and be trained for them. People asked for “public health emergency drills”. People cited school fire drills, tornado warnings and foghorns as examples of how people are trained for disasters.
- The people of color tended to be mistrustful of public officials. In contrast, the white people said public officials would be the people they would trust during a public health emergency. Both groups said they would trust the information and directions of medical personnel in the case of a public health emergency.
- People were concerned about access to good, affordable healthcare.
- People were concerned about toxic cleaning products.

- People were concerned about the general safety of children at school. People cited the need for a nurse to be available throughout the school day (not just part-time). After the focus group discussion was brought to emergency preparedness, some focus group participants were concerned that there might not be an emergency preparedness plan in place at schools.
- People were concerned that medical personnel did not have translators who could accurately translate medical information back and forth between doctors and patients. People were also concerned that language barriers would get in the way of learning about emergency preparedness procedures.

Recommendations for video

The main value of the video is to explain what is public health and show what public health does.

- Public Health 101: Define public health and the difference between public health and health care. Use a “value of prevention” theme, and show the personal and fiscal costs of not preventing disease.
- Show the breadth of public health (discuss public health issues, public health infrastructure). Make a case for the importance of public health.
- Show that there is emergency preparedness planning underway. Are there examples of how plans and specialized responses have already been effective? State that there are authorities responsible in each community for emergency preparedness; different communities are in different states of readiness. Have phone number (and Web site address) that people can call for more information.
- Regarding Bioterrorism, the video should neither overstate the fear nor give false assurance. We want avoid being alarmist. Rather, we should give a factual orientation and allow the viewer to make his or her own assessment.
- People will be skeptical if the video reeks of the Bush Administration’s agenda. Show that public health is more than just the militarized aspects of it, and that it is not just the domain of the Republican Administration.
- Use medical personnel and scientists – not elected officials – as interviewees.
- Given that people were concerned with health access, emphasize the importance of school nurses. Show that when people have access to health care, they have access to preventative education, screenings and immunizations.
- Have racial and gender diversity in the video.

Notes:

1. Friday, February 13, 2004 Focus Group in Worcester, Belmont Street School

They did not know a lot about PH overall. Many did not know what Bioterrorism is. One woman could list off types of PH emergencies, like anthrax, small pox, resin. They said they'd trust elected officials, police officers, and firefighters. One woman knew that you should call the local health board if you find a dead bird in your yard. No one really knew, however, what the local health board does. One woman mentioned building code violations, mice, trash, asbestos, lead, animal feces, trash in the neighborhood. Consisted of 5 white people and one person of color.

Are you concerned about bioterrorism?

Not all the time, but the scares have has an effect

No one ran out and got duct tape and plastic when it was in the news. One woman said that all of this is meant to scare us and it's a political maneuver

What is PH?

Environment Affects our health

Schools, outside the home

Hand washing

Things you do to be considerate of others

Health issues – people responsible for containing diseases

Germs from outside get into your home.

Health Service w/o paying

Health insurance

Brushing your teeth, shower, take trash out

What is the difference between health care and PH?

You have to pay for HC, PH, you don't

Gas leak – it's dangerous, and a PH issue

Health related things that affect a lot of people

Head lice

Flu

Pink eye

Mold at South High – headaches, asthma attacks, naseua, rash

PH can affect school attendance

School lunches – lack of food, quality, eating lunch at 10:15 isn't healthy

Schools are overcrowded

Bioterrorism**What is it?**

Small Pox, anthrax, resin

Are you concerned about it?

Not all the time, but the scares have has an effect

No one ran out and got duct tape and plastic when it was in the news. One woman said that all of this is meant to scare us and it's a political maneuver

Children can't take mail out of mailbox

Children now have to more aware

Code blue- practice what to do if someone has a gun

Travel – do I let my highschooler go to DC on the class trip?

How do you get info in a PH emergency?

From the TV, radio, call the city manager

Who do I trust in a PH emergency?

Local officials, police officers, paramedics

School nurses - head lice (nurse knows what that looks like)

Children with special needs (meds, asthma)

A child falls, who cleans up the scrape

Who takes care of sick children

Belmont is lucky because its business partner is UMass-Memorial, health workshops, Ronald McDonald van, helps to get care for children without insurance.

Most important things

Nurses in school

Orientation and prevention

Health education

Nutrition

Make public aware of what can be done and where it can be accessed

Health insurance too expensive

Immunization needed in public schools

Children are safe in bioterrorism emergency

2. Lowell Focus Group Thursday, February 19, 2004, St. Mary's Church

This focus group consisted of 7 people of color. The majority of people were working class.

What is PH?

Many people thought ph is personal hygiene. Another person thought it was food and nutrition.

Someone else thought it was insurance.

People were concerned about health cuts to poor people

Concerned that there was not enough info. In doctors' offices. Only in magazines.

What is the difference between public health and health care?

Health care is insurance companies; ph is surroundings

What are examples of ph?

Germs – the act of keeping places clean where children are: daycares, schools. Also other places: restaurant bathrooms and kitchens.

Mold

Chronicle story on building a sick building.

Mistrustful of government

Roaches

Abstetos

Teflon – saw show on 20/20. One woman said she likes the consumer interest aspect of shows like 20/20, Dateline, 60 Minutes.

Concerned about cleaning agents and the inhalation of toxic chemicals. One woman said we need more environmentally safe products to clean one's house.

Duct Tape and plastic sheeting – did you buy it?

It's ludicrous – waste of money. No one bought the duct tape when the Administration said to do so.

9/11 → People can't expect an emergency, so why prepare?

Whose job is it to protect the public's health?

It is the responsibility of manufacturers and the public together to take care of the public's health. Government should have stricter regulations.

What is bioterrorism?

Anthrax

Chemicals

One woman said bioterrorism is whenever a huge group will be affected intentionally.

If there was a ph emergency...

Go to Internet to get information

Medical personnel would be trusted

People want to know in the video what they should do and what phone number they should call. Instructions, directions.

Do you know if there is a local board of health in your community?

No.

How do you feel about the public health resources in your town or city?

More needs to be done, USA is obese.

Example of when you would call your local board of health?

West nile: put dead insect from your property in a plastic bag and bring it to board of health.

Health board will help if there's an infestation problem.

3. Lawrence Focus Group, February 23, 2004 Nobel Bookstore

What is ph?

Housing being up to code

Infestation of mice, rats

Cleanliness of an area where you live – like not having “rubbish” or a junkyard there

Personal hygiene

Government services having to do with public health

Way things are disposed of (trash, medical waste); concern about trash worker safety

Concerns about needles in parks, playgrounds

Problem of lack of ability of medical personnel speaking medical Spanish

What is the difference between public health and health care?

There's not much difference.

Public health = needles, trash, all examples from before. This is different from doctors and hospitals

Shortage of flu vaccines – Lawrence PH nurse ran out of vaccines

PH is allocated for the public but doesn't require prerequisites like health insurance. PH is for everyone.

There should be more free medical care. People with the flu have to get better on their own.

There is the problem for illiterate Spanish speakers. Just having things written in Spanish sometimes isn't enough.

PH and health care is the “same thing”.

PH = intervention, ways to avoid illness vs. providing care.

Whose job is it to protect the public's health?

The government.

Government should know about dangers to the community.

Educate the people: like don't put battery acid, car oil in the sewer because it hurts the water supply.

Asbestos is bad, especially for gardeners.

Community needs to work together; we need prevention services, we need culturally appropriate messages on cleaning products.

Air quality – paint fumes, factories, fumes from cars and trucks.

What is Bioterrorism?

Bombs, anthrax, SARS, rubella

Chemical warfare, what's going on in Iraq.

Radiation can hurt people.

No one knew what the various alert levels mean.
People need vaccinations
Dirty bombs
If people are illiterate, they won't know what's going on.
Germs, sicknesses
We don't have good information
Government should invest in ways to protect people.

Duct tape

No one bought it even though the media said to do so
Political issue – US shouldn't have invaded Iraq
We should have a procedure in the case of emergency

Are you worried about bioterrorism?

Yes.
In the back of my mind.
There's nothing we can do – the government should tell us what to do.
Everyone is worried.
Yes.
We should be more taught and more informed.
Yes, I'm worried but I'm only worried about the big city
Yes, but our travels. Local communities are vulnerable.

What would you do in the case of an emergency?

Call police, fire, Red Cross, 911

Who would you trust?
All people said they'd trust a doctor over an elected official or police officer.

What does the local board of health do?
DPH = hospital
"sits in lower level of city hall"
Yes, there is one.
They give licenses, asbestos, lead, chemicals
Concern that people in Lawrence have to go to Haverhill or Boston for certain permits
Local office gives out vaccines, but "they pick and choose who they give it to"
The offices should not tell people to go to their doctor – they should treat everyone.
When you see a building code violation (showers falling apart, feces in the public bathroom)
Health code violations in housing: mold, lead, radon
Restaurant violations
Water infestation into residences
Upgrade needed in trash compacting and oil disposal
Lawrence transferred money from water department to a general account

What is the most important issue we discussed?

Awareness, more info, plan of attack should there be an emergency

More information (x3)

Prevention of health, the duty of the city

Contamination of water

The flu

The government needs to implement information on how to prevent infections and steps to help people

Find a way to communicate to all segments of the community

Communication, education, prevention, the steps of what is happening

Refugee center to take people in the case of disaster